

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

---

8-19-2021

## SERVICE QUALITY GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN KENYA

paul mbua  
mbuapm@gmail.com

Dennis N. Ocholla  
*University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, South Africa*

Janneke Mostert  
*University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, South Africa*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>

---

mbua, paul; Ocholla, Dennis N.; and Mostert, Janneke, "SERVICE QUALITY GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN THE ACADEMIC LIBRARIES IN KENYA" (2021). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 6201.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6201>

## **1. Introduction and context**

The subject of service quality has been widely researched in various sectors, and academic libraries are no exception. Service quality has become a major area of focus among practitioners, managers and researchers owing to its strong impact on business performance (Leonard and Sasser, 1982), lower costs (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), customer satisfaction (Silvestro and Cross (2000), customer loyalty (Sureshchandler Rajendran and Anatharaman ,2002), and profitability (Guru, (2003).

Metters et.al (2006:21) note that services differ from goods in a number of ways, such as:

- Services are intangible
- Services can be consumed simultaneously as they are produced
- Services often require closer proximity to the customer
- Services cannot be inventoried like goods

Metters et.al. (2006:31) assert that the service process system influences the physical layout and systems required for effective service delivery. They also observe that the items of the service setup that must be in place include: job responsibilities, technology requirements, equipment requirements, facility layout, management policies and procedures, service process designs, operating capacity, and the quality of management systems.

Sultan and Wong (2011) assert that whereas the commercial sector has been studying service quality for decades, the increasing number of studies on service quality in the tertiary level education sector is a fairly recent phenomenon. Evidently, higher education should borrow from the research already done in the commercial sector and incorporate their quality approaches and their focus on customer satisfaction. Paswan and Ganesh (2009) take note of the fact that many tertiary institutions are now aggressively hunting for clients, both locally and on the global scene. This is driven by the urge to survive in a competitive environment.

With the rise of a variety of informal platforms (e.g. social media) that seek customers to give their feedback based on their interactions, the need for quality service has become critical. Academic institutions thus have to account for the quality of education and the services that they offer. Abdullah (2006) agrees, asserting that achieving quality is an important goal for higher educational institutions and stressing that this needs to happen in all areas/departments. DeShields, Kara and Kaynak (2005) proposed that the tertiary level education sector should incorporate high quality service approaches with a strong customer focus in order to meet customers' needs in a highly challenging service environment.

Abdullah (2006) believes that it is necessary to assess the level of service quality along with the parameters that influence service quality. This enables higher education institutions to plan their service delivery processes and aids in identifying the factors at play in the provision of services, thus leading to better allocation of the available resources and resulting in improved services.

Sakthivel and Raju (2007) note that quality in tertiary level education ought to be viewed as being multifaceted, encompassing: - teaching and academic programs; research and scholarship; staffing; buildings; equipment; services to society; and academia. Marwa (2014:72) suggests that there is a need to embrace an international outlook, meaning the sharing of knowledge, collaborative networking, and the movement of faculty and learners within the socio-cultural context. Kanyangi (2006) concurs that quality in education is what draws customers, which can be measured by overall interaction and delivery and whether their primary information needs have been met. Saitoti (2003) likewise agrees that for the assessment of quality in higher education, it is crucial to consider the infrastructural setup, i.e. equipment and instructional materials, information resources, physical facilities and quality of staff, among other factors. In summing it up, Marwa (2014:72) observes that the Kenyan tertiary level educational sector is grappling with an upsurge of stakeholder demands (scholars, academics, researchers, government, funding agencies, and the community) for superior academic experiences and offerings. Academic libraries have not been exempt from this. It has thus become imperative that academic libraries in Africa, Kenya in particular, re-examine their existence in academia, in order to justify the need for their services. The Kenyan government, alarmed by the poor level of service being meted out by its departments to its citizenry, initiated public sector reforms aimed at rightsizing initiatives and rationalising government functions and structures (GoK, 2004). In its 2003 policy document, Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS), 2003-2007, the Kenyan government (GoK, 2003), underscores the factors negatively impacting on the performance of the public sector. These include: bureaucracy and red tape; political interference; outright mismanagement; and bloated staff establishment. The focus of the ERS was to revitalise and equip the public service, well enabling it to continue to play its important role in nation building. Focusing on the education sector, Marwa (2014:72) acknowledges the need to entrench quality in Kenyan educational institutions.

All university activities, as pointed out by the Presidential Working Party in Kenya on the establishment of a second university (GoK: 1988:65), are meant to address and find solutions to societal, developmental, and emerging social-economic needs. Leupp (1924) described it as “the heart of the University”, sentiments that were echoed by the 2nd president of India – “Library is the heart of an institution” made the presence of a library inevitable in all institutions and playing a very vital role in the learning process of an academic institution (Misbah, 2016). The academic library is therefore expected to collect, organise, store and disseminate relevant and representative information resources in order to meet the information needs of its user community. The regulatory body of university education in Kenya, the Commission for University Education (CUE) which monitors and regulates the operations of universities as well as inspect their facilities, has outlined the guidelines for university libraries with the sole purpose of improving the quality of resources and services offered. According to the Commission for University Education, the library’s primary role is to assist its users in the process of transforming information into knowledge (CUE, 2017b). At the bare minimum, university libraries in Kenya should be well equipped with varied information resources and in diverse formats; well-staffed with trained personnel; have a reasonable budget; have a library building; up to date ICT infrastructure. However, academic libraries in Kenya, both public and

private, suffer from under-funding Mutula (2000:328). Karshorda and Waema (2014) in their E-readiness survey of Kenyan Universities, established that OPAC usage in libraries was still limited- the off-campus students being largely disadvantaged; with most of the libraries having not integrated electronic and Internet-based information such as e-books into their digital libraries, this confirming Chisenga (2000) and Mutula (2004) earlier findings. Thus the academic libraries need to effectively prepare for the future besides positioning themselves in their respective environments, by indicating that they understand their changing roles in the current learning and research environment.

## **2. Problem and purpose of the Study**

We argue that without service quality university libraries cannot survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where competition with other information service providers is overwhelming. According to Kargbo (2002:1), libraries are enacting measures geared to satisfying the information demands of modern society. However, Opaleke (2002:105) have found that service delivery in most academic libraries has been below customers' expectations. What then, is the actual quality of the services being offered to the clientele? With increased customer awareness, libraries have to be accountable to their clientele, parent organisations, and other accrediting bodies in terms of service delivery. They need to justify their existence and the very services they offer for any continued support.

Opaleke (2002:102) stresses that certain factors have to be in place for quality service delivery to be realised, such as: adequate staff, adequate and quality information resources, space, enough financial resources, and appropriate technology (e.g. service parameters such as: binding services, reprographics, Internet, integrated library systems, telephones, etc.). Rosenberg (1997:1) in an earlier study highlighted the plight of university libraries in Africa citing their inability to fully satisfy the information needs of users. Consequently, libraries have been marginalised by the university, leading to a widening use of alternative approaches and systems for accessing and acquiring information. Salman (2015) agrees that libraries are facing a range of challenges that are also affecting their service delivery. Moropa (2010) echoed such sentiments concluding that, despite their important role, their survival is under threat, as they are fast being edged out of their position as academic power-houses in the university. But according to Chandhok and Babbar (2011), with some service innovation, they could reach out to the hitherto unreached, and regain their status as power-houses within the academic institution. Among other things, the researcher in the current study is of the view that libraries need to update the quality of their services in order to gain a competitive edge over similar service providers and thus continue to remain relevant in the current era of technological revolution and advancement

Several studies, for example Poon and Lee (2012); Watiki (2014); Anjum and Zargar (2018) and Chandra et. al. (2018), have been carried out on service quality and in many sectors, with a few studies, such as such as Calvert (2008) in New Zealand, Miller (2008) in the US, Somaratna and Peiris (2011) in Sri Lanka, Dube (2011) in South Africa, Balog, Jelusic and Matosic (2015) in Croatia, Adam (2017) in Nigeria and Rehman (2013) in Pakistan focusing on academic libraries. The increase of university users and the sprawling number of university libraries in Kenya and inadequate library resources demand a library service quality

assessment. This study therefore sought to establish the level of service quality in Kenyan academic libraries.

This paper is guided by these objectives: To establish customer perceptions concerning service quality; assess the library customer service orientation and its influence on service quality; and the range of services/products offered by the academic libraries influence on service quality in the academic libraries.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

This study is based on the Gap model advanced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985). The Gap model has not only been tested, but also widely used in the assessment of service quality in firms in diverse industries

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) are of the view that service quality is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimension, i.e. What the customer expects or considers being quality service set against how it is delivered. The model posits that any variance between the service(s) offered in relation to the customers' expectation represents a service gap. This gap depicts the dissatisfaction with the service delivered; it is this Gap around which the Gap model is premised. Although the Gap model has been revised several times, the original idea/concept has remained.

A service quality model based on gap analysis depicts service quality as a fulfilment of certain conditions. Failure to meet these conditions means that there are shortfalls in the service delivery, otherwise referred to as gaps. These (shortfalls) have to be addressed for the service to be within the acceptable levels. The size of the gap serves as a pointer to the quality of the service provided, which in turn has a bearing on the customer's satisfaction level.

### **4. Methodology**

Mixed method approach was used to generate both qualitative and quantitative data. From the entire list of accredited universities in Kenya as of 2015, a sample of 10 (ten) institutions was selected. In each institution external (library users) and internal (librarians) users were targeted. Among the external library customers 100 respondents were randomly selected, while among the librarians 80 respondents were targeted. Seven hundred and fourteen (714) questionnaires were returned from the external library customers (55% males and 45% females); while for the internal library customers (librarians), 47 out of the 80 questionnaires administered were returned (43% males and 57% females). This gave an overall, 76% response rate. A purposive sampling procedure was used to collect data from the interview participants (who were the senior management of the academic libraries) using an interview schedule, in total 10 interviews were conducted. The SERVQUAL tool was used as data collection tool for the external and internal

### **5. Results and discussion**

#### **5.1. The influence of service parameters on service delivery: Librarians' perceptions of library service quality**

From the study findings, it is evident that the service providers were aware of good service delivery and the related contributing factors. It was also evident that, to a great extent, service was influenced by personal attributes such as empathy. It was also revealed that the ease with which the customers can approach the librarians, as well as the efforts made by the libraries to understand the needs of their customers, have a lot of positive influence on customer satisfaction. However, convenient locations of the libraries and personal attention to customers, though important, was not really fulfilled. But on the whole, it was noted that trained staff were considered to be assets, and efforts to enhance staff training were put in place at both corporate and the individual levels. Efforts, too, were made to understand and meet customer needs.

With regard to attributes such as responsiveness and assurance, it is worth noting that the librarians value a positive image, and are thus making efforts to show good behaviour to their customers, by being ready and willing to help the patrons who require their services. This way, the library customers also gain confidence with regard to making use of the resources available and their own safety while in the library. Assurance as regards (the competence of the system and its credibility in providing a courteous and secure service) is also taken seriously. This is demonstrated by the librarians' willingness to guide and instruct them on how to make use of the varied information resources and usage of the different media into which information is packaged, such as the audio-visual and electronic formats. However, there is more to do on issues of responsiveness and assurance, in view of the fact that customers sometimes complained about rude staff members and sloppy service.

Similarly, the level/degree of responsiveness (the willingness to help customers by rendering services promptly) in service delivery is important, and requires the creation of a conducive service environment, reasonable working/service hours for the staff/clients, and the right equipment for them to be able to work/deliver service.

Physical facilities, the general cleanliness of the facilities and the materials in the library make up the tangible attributes; hence, the state of these facilities greatly impacts on service delivery, so it becomes imperative that due attention is given to them.

With regard to being reliable (i.e. the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), it is evident that the library service(s) need to be more reliable, when promises made to the customers are honoured regardless of the cost involved; and consistency maintained at all times in the service delivery process. For the service to be reliable, training is critical.

## **5.2. External customers' perceptions of service quality.**

Study findings by the external customers on service quality attributes were tested using Karl Pearson to gauge their importance. The results were: Empathy (0.895), tangibles (0.849), responsiveness (0.836), and assurance (0.829). These results showed a strong positive correlation between each of these attributes and service quality, implying that they influenced, to a great extent, the level of service delivery, and consequently service quality. Table 1 summarises these results.

The customers expressed the need for empathy and sought individual attention, convenient operating hours, and the impression that the service personnel understand their needs. This mirrors the views of the service providers. Tangibles were rated highly by the customers, thus requiring good, clean and functional equipment for use. However, there is a need to improve on the general appearance of the physical facilities, acquire more library information resources, which should also be well maintained. The customers also sought a situation in which the service provider would be more responsive to their needs/complaints in a time-saving manner. With regard to being reliable (the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), the respondents agreed that the library service(s) need to be reliable.

		ASSURANCE	RESPONSIVENESS	EMPATHY	TANGIBLES	SERVICE QUALITY
ASSURANCE	Pearson Correlation	1	0.675**	0.674**	0.579**	0.829**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
RESPONSIVENESS	Pearson Correlation	0.675**	1	0.725**	0.552**	0.836**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
EMPATHY	Pearson Correlation	0.674**	0.725**	1	0.644**	0.895**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
TANGIBLES	Pearson Correlation	0.579**	0.552**	0.644**	1	0.849**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
SERVICE QUALITY	Pearson Correlation	0.829**	0.836**	0.895**	0.849**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**Table 1: Karl Pearson’s correlation coefficient of the service attributes according to customers N=714**

Overall, the customers do have some degree of satisfaction in using the libraries, but the libraries will need to keep the promises made to the customers and strive to do things correctly when providing services. This will help to boost the image of the library, and that of the librarians.

Regarding responsiveness (the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), while referring to the above statement on customer satisfaction levels, the findings are that overall, the customers do have some degree of satisfaction in using the libraries.

In reference to the customer satisfaction levels of the respondents, it was noted that with regard to empathy (the approachability, ease of access and effort taken to understand customers' needs), overall the customers were satisfied. The ease of access to the library services, coupled with the ease with which they can approach the librarians to make enquiries, and the degree to which they feel that their individual research and information needs catered for encourage them to be good library users.

On assurance (the competence of the system and its credibility in providing a courteous and secure service), the customers do have some degree of satisfaction. In conclusion, it can be said that the experience the customers get upon visiting the libraries, to a large extent, influences their return visits.

### **5.3 Library customer service orientation: How is the library market orientated?**

Market orientation was observed in various aspects of the library service; for instance, through periodic reviews of their activities, they conduct market surveys in a bid to understand customers' needs better. It was evident that they aspired to stock different formats of information resources to cater for customers' information needs. However, budgetary constraints limited this objective. From Table 2, it is evident that the different libraries conduct customer surveys (many customer surveys within the library are evident as 57% of the respondents agreed that this happens). Benchmarking with other, similar institutions is also prevalent, though this is independently carried out through individuals (supported by 41% of the respondents) who perform market research activities on their competitors, such as other information providers: universities and public libraries. Benchmarking in this case is not embraced as an official activity. This could possibly be due to business rivalry and competition and organisational bureaucracy; the approach used is more informal than formal. The study highlighted limited market research on competitors as only 41% agreed that there was market research on competitors. This may be due to a lack of understanding of its importance and the knowhow to conduct market research.

It was also established that there were regular consultative meetings (by 62% of the respondents) between customers and library employees, to identify the programmes/services that would be needed in future, as well as getting to know the customer needs. Efforts were also made to reach out to customers, with the intention of learning how best to meet their needs (a fact that was supported by 77% of the respondents, with only 23% being uncertain). However, of concern is the fact that 45% of the librarian respondents intimated that they were able to detect slow changes in the client usage preferences/habits; while a further 36% of the librarians agreed that the libraries are able to detect shifts/new trends in the information industry (like competition, technology), with 52% of the respondents disagreeing. This indicates a gap in the marketing of the information resources. The implication is that the libraries may continue to lose their customers without being aware of it due to their lack of overall knowledge of the new frontiers in the information industry and the trending subjects.

Also, the libraries did engage in periodic reviews of the possible effects of changes in the library service environment, by factors such as technology, access to the library and hours of

service. Only 10% of the respondents indicated that they did not carry out such reviews, while 47% of the respondents indicated that they do.

Still, the different libraries looked inwards, assessing their own services by conducting process control evaluation of their service systems, a fact supported by 47% of the

Statements		Strongly agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD
1	Customers and library employees hold meetings on a regular basis to find out the programmes/services they will need in future	8	17	21	45	6	13	7	15	5	10	47	100	2.57	1.247
2	Employees/customers interact freely and directly with customers to learn how to satisfy their needs	13	13	23	49	3	23	0	0	0	0	47	100	1.96	0.721
3	We conduct a lot of customer survey within the library	7	15	20	42	13	28	6	13	1	2	47	100	2.45	0.974
4	We slowly detect changes in the client usage preferences/habits	3	7	18	38	17	36	9	19	0	0	47	100	2.68	0.862
5	We slowly detect changes in the client usage preferences/habits	7	15	15	32	17	36	7	15	1	2	47	100	2.57	0.994
6	We collect industry information i.e. information service (like over lunch, with library friends and experts)	2	4	17	36	15	32	8	17	5	11	47	100	2.94	1.071
7	We conduct market research on our competitors (e.g. other information providers- universities, public libraries etc.)independently through individuals	5	11	14	30	13	27	10	21	5	11	47	100	2.91	1.176
8	We do not always detect shifts/new trends in the information industry (like competition, technology)	1	2	16	34	6	13	14	30	10	21	47	100	3.34	1.221

9	We periodically review the possible effects of changes in our business/service environment, such as technology, access and hours of service on customers	5	10	27	57	11	23	3	6	1	4	47	100	2.32	0.837
<i>Cronbach Alpha Coefficient = 0.7; Composite Mean = 2.638, SD = 1.011</i>															

**Table 2: Library Market Survey N=47**

respondents who agreed that they were doing it, with 36% of the respondents being uncertain and 17% indicating that they never did any such evaluations. This is critical as it helps them identify failures and/or challenges in their own service delivery systems. This is consistent with the assertion of the TQM on the need for continuous improvement and regular quality appraisal of the internal processes of an organisation in order to ensure that they deliver what is expected. From these findings, it can be concluded that there is some awareness of market orientation with different approaches being used to realise this, but it is also evident that there are gaps in this. It needs to be entrenched into the management of the libraries.

### 5.3.1. Library communication

Organisational communication is very critical, and from the study it was established that there were several communication channels in existence among the staff, the staff and the library management, and between the library staff and its management together with the university management. A lot of the informal talk in the library focused on the new service strategies or the customer complaints (as represented by 83% of the respondents in Table 2. Similarly, regular joint consultative meetings between staff and the library management focusing on future information market trends are prevalent. Such forums are important in that the goals to be set and /strategies to be used in realising these are well discussed. The service providers freely share information on customer interests, services/products available via different formats. However, and of concern, is that there was minimal communication between the library managers and employees concerning new service developments/customer complaints (only 30% of the respondents agreed to there being minimal communication, while 21% of the respondents were uncertain, and 49% disagreed).

On the question as to *whether the library periodically circulates information/documents (like newsletters) that provide information on their customers, and services/products*, 72% of the respondents agreed, 9% were uncertain, while 19% of the respondents disagreed (See Table 5.9). From the responses, it was established that, though there was a sharing of information, it was somewhat limited. The net result of this was that the service providers were giving service in a blurred environment. For good and quality service, it is important that there is openness in the sharing of such crucial information. Kaur and Singh (2010) stress that the library needs to make known to customers what is available and what is not. This is important as it helps them avoid having raised expectations, which will lead to dissatisfaction if not met. In support of this, Mbambo-Thata (2010) note that technology is fast creating lateral connections in libraries,

challenging the traditional library structure and diminishing the boundaries. Other means used to inform clients may include newsletters, posters and presentations to faculty. The library staff too, markets the new service to students.

Statements		Strongly agree		Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%				
1	A lot of the informal talk in the library concerns politics and life not the new service strategies or the customer complaints	0	0	3	6	5	11	13	28	26	55	47	100	4.2	1.093
2	We meet as library staff and the managers regularly to discuss future information market trends	11	24	26	55	8	17	1	2	1	2	47	100	2.04	0.833
3	Library staff spend time prior to a semester's schedule discussing customer needs/interests	16	34	18	38	4	9	7	15	2	4	47	100	2.17	1.185
4	The library periodically circulates information/documents (like newsletters) that provide information on our customers, our services/products.	10	21	24	51	4	9	5	10	4	9	47	100	2.34	1.185
5	When something important happens to our royal customers the library knows about it within a short period (like sickness, death, accident ,marriage)	7	15	13	27	17	36	5	11	5	11	47	100	2.74	1.170
6	Data on client satisfaction is circulated to all employees regularly	1	2	20	43	12	26	11	23	3	6	47	100	2.89	1.005
7	There is minimal communication between the library managers and employees concerning new service developments/customer complaints	6	13	8	17	5	11	16	34	11	23	47	100	3.21	1.267
8	When the library managers find out something important about new innovations,	7	15	8	17	5	11	16	34	11	23	47	100	3.34	1.403

	it is slow to inform/alert employees														
9	Library management and staff spend time together with the university management discussing customer needs/interests	5	11	18	38	11	23	5	11	8	17	47	100	2.85	1.268
<i>Cronbach Alpha Coefficient = 0.7; Composite Mean = 2.871, SD = 1.157</i>															

**Table 3: Library Communication**

### 5.3.2 Information sharing of data on client satisfaction

From Table 3, regarding regular information sharing of data on client satisfaction with all the employees: 45% of the respondents agreed that this was happening, 26% were uncertain, while 29% of the respondents disagreed. It would be important for all service providers to have the accurate information of their clients, as this would help in channelling the best service to them. To find out how strong the bond was between the librarians and library clients, it was found that only 42% of the respondents agreed that *when something important happens to their royal customers, the library knows about it within a short period (like sickness, death, accident, marriage)*. 36% of the respondents were uncertain and 22% of the respondents disagreed. This stresses the fact that there is a need for a good relationship between the staff and the customers. The customers need to see a friend in the service provider; one who can empathise. Expounding further on this, St Clair (1993:3) adapted a working definition of customer service for information services: “Good customer relations [are] a continuing, mutually satisfying contract between the information service organisation and the users” . This relationship between the service provider and users of service builds on a strong understanding of customer expectations, wants and needs. Dimension Data (2019) in support, note that customer experiences help determine the quality of the service. In their 2019 Global customer experience benchmark report, they assert that customer experience is the perception that customers have of a brand throughout their journey with an organisation and that many executives recognise it as a competitive differentiator, thus adding up to one holistic customer experience.

### 5.3.3 Communication of new service innovations

. Similarly, as depicted in Table 3, there was a limited flow of crucial information pertaining to innovation from the library managers to their juniors about new innovations: only 32% of the respondents confirmed this, while 57% of the respondents disagreed with this assertion and 11% were uncertain. There is also *minimal communication between the library managers and employees concerning new service developments/customer complaints*, as only 30% of the respondents agreed to this, 21% were uncertain and 49% disagreed that this was happening, which is quite disturbing. The high standard deviation value of greater than 1, of the responses, is possibly an indicator to the high variability in the management approaches of the library managers, and/or the nature of the existing staff/management relationship(s). This is an indicator of the need to share information freely and in a transparent manner, so that all the service providers can benefit. It is a pointer on the skewed flow of information from the top library management to the frontline staff.

With regard to communication with the top university management, the finding is that this is not fully embraced, as only about 50% of the respondents are agreeable that this really takes place effectively. In summary, it is evident that there is a flow of information, both vertically and horizontally, but also a lot of informal communication that takes place. In conclusion, it is justified to say that although there is evidence of some form of communication, both vertical and horizontal, taking place in the different libraries, it is somewhat warped, however, and there is a dire need to improve the situation. This would help the library staff, especially on the frontline, to get to know any new developments. Similarly, they (frontline staff) are more likely to give instant feedback regarding certain internal policy decisions with regard to service delivery. This will, in turn, help improve service delivery to customers.

#### **5.3.4 Service innovation**

It was observed that several service innovations had been put in place in an effort to make service delivery better. In this regard, there are several service innovations in place. As a way of reaching out to customers, market segmentation was applied, differentiating services/products according to the user group(s) with 50% affirming that they did so. Likewise, there were periodic reviews of service to ensure that the libraries met the needs of customers, a view supported by 80% of the respondents. L, efforts were made to deal with customer complaints, with corrective measures undertaken promptly (as affirmed by 81% of the respondents). However, there were challenges in dealing with these, and in certain cases, the complaints were just ignored. This was done to deal with customer dissatisfaction, but the quality of service was observed to be below par. It was also established that the librarians, though keen to promote good library service, for instance, through valid library marketing plans, were limited and not able to implement the plans in a timely manner. Also noted was a lapse in the implementation of service strategies, and especially on how to respond to competitors' new service offerings and technology innovations. Only 45% of the respondents agreed that they would launch a response immediately. Service innovation was noted, in cases where the libraries tried to be flexible and accommodative, particularly when it was found that customers would like the library to modify or change a programme/service routine. This view was supported by 76% of the respondents. In summary, it is evident that there is an effort to be innovative in their service delivery processes. Furthermore, it was established technology was applied to the different library operations in an effort to improve on efficiency in service delivery. Technology application is part of the business process re-engineering and is bound to help the achievement of dramatic improvements in service delivery.

#### **5.4 The range of services/products offered by the academic libraries influence on service quality**

From the study, monographs and online materials were rated as the most readily available information resources. Table 4 giving a summary of the findings, it was established that in the majority of the libraries, the following were readily available: books, e-resources, periodicals, and computers. The least available were materials and equipment for the PWDs and children's library section. Table 4, gives a summary of the findings from the customers' views. Books, e-resources, computers, and periodicals were rated highly by the library customers, while the

non-book materials, services for the PWDs, A/V materials and interlibrary services were rated as being least available. Others were Internet, computers, training/instruction on the usage of the available resources, reprographic and bindery services, etc. The observations made support this. However, in terms of catering for special needs, such as services to the faculty staff, and post-graduates, the rating was low. Services to persons with disabilities (PWDs) in particular was poorly presented; almost being left to chance, with the exception of two institutions that showed a satisfactory degree of preparedness in offering services to the PWDs. From the interviews carried out, coupled with the study observations it was also evident that most of the academic libraries are least prepared to deal with the PLWDs with regard to information resources provision, service delivery, poor etiquette, availability of appropriate equipment required to assist them and staff training. In the majority of the institutions, there was a general apathy toward this category of customers, a dire lack of suitable and appropriate resources for them such as washrooms, furniture, and a complete lack of seating/working space specifically dedicated to them, with the buildings in certain cases being inaccessible to them. Table 4 illustrates this.

EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS RESPONSES ON THE AVAILABLE LIBRARY RESOURCES AND SERVICES (% of respondents agreeing on the availability of these resources)										
	ACL 1	ACL 2	ACL 3	ACL 4	ACL 5	ACL 6	ACL 7	ACL 8	ACL 9	ACL 10
Books	99	98	92	94	94	98	85	95	82	92
Non book media (n.b.m) e.g. maps, portraits,	21	13	7	14	33	11	15	16	10	1
e-resources	63	72	45	61	89	95	92	54	71	16
Computers	46	67	68	70	80	55	72	67	83	16
Children's section	2	6	5	3	4	2	3	2	3	1
Discussion rooms	11	0	1	2	67	11	12	11	1	0
Periodicals e.g. magazines, newspapers, journals	12	58	42	47	80	33	72	66	44	16
Facilities for the physically challenged	5	1	3	11	4	5	8	16	0	0
Projectors	4	0	3	0	31	4	15	5	0	0
Sound equipment e.g. headphones, music players	5	0	3	0	17	4	7	0	0	0
Audio-visual materials- music, films, photos etc.	1	0	4	0	39	2	23	2	0	0
General information reference materials e.g. business directories	11	4	21	20	41	9	47	46	6	0
Telephone services	0	0	3	0	13	4	10	7	0	0
Photocopying services	37	64	18	67	66	36	28	7	6	16
Printing services	13	46	11	44	40	15	17	7	4	9
Scanners	23	21	10	22	36	9	15	3	1	4

Binding services	33	16	8	23	73	20	18	7	4	8
Internet services	13	13	42	50	66	60	67	77	14	0
Cafeteria services	0	0	3	0	9	4	7	0	0	0
Textbook collection	10	9	26	44	59	20	43	59	6	0
Inter library services	2	0	5	19	36	15	15	13	1	0

**Table 4: Library resources and services available (external customers) (% of respondents agreeing on the availability of these resources) N=714**

#### 5.4.1 Service delivery process

It was also established that several strategies are employed in the service delivery process, for instance, the library staff were involved in service decision-making. From Table 5, it is evident that 77% of the staff agreed to this while 94% of the respondents agreed that they were aware of the changes taking place in the department. However, the service staff were not involved in key strategic decisions as these were left to the library top management. It is also evident that the staff were well aware of the threats of competition from other service providers (43% of the respondents revealed that they have had to change their range of services/products in varying degrees and that the competitors had forced them to change work methods/service delivery styles). There were variations of the service strategies from one institution to the other, as well as available activities and facilities.

It is, therefore, obvious that the academic libraries are working in a very competitive terrain and the competition has to be dealt with through the adoption and enactment of strategic decisions, purchase of new machines/equipment, quality information resources, and change of work methods/service delivery styles. Employee creativity at work was greatly encouraged as indicated and supported by 76% of the respondents; another 60% indicated that they were allowed to vary the service delivery procedures, depending on the need/situation. It was also noted that 93% of the respondents laid a lot of emphasis on service growth through the development of new ideas and innovation/new information resources. It is thus clear that the staff were encouraged to be creative and were also given some degree of latitude to vary the service, depending on the circumstance.

	Statements	Always		Often		Occasionally		Rarely		Never		Total	%	Mean	Standard Deviation
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
1	Our competitors forces us to change the range of our services/products	3	6	5	11	12	26	17	36	10	21	47	100	3.55	1.138
2	Competitors often force us to change/purchase our machines/ equipment	0	0	7	15	11	23	18	38	11	23	47	100	3.70	0.998
3	Competitors force us to change work methods/service delivery styles	1	2	8	17	11	24	17	36	10	21	47	100	3.57	1.078

4	Library staff service providers participate in decision making	15	32	12	26	9	19	8	17	3	6	47	100	2.40	1.280
5	Library staff are aware of changes to be undertaken in the library	22	47	16	34	6	13	2	4	1	2	47	100	1.81	0.970
6	Change decision are made by the library managers alone	13	28	7	15	15	32	8	17	4	8	47	100	2.64	1.293
7	Rules and procedures set must be followed strictly	21	45	15	32	11	23	0	0	0	0	47	100	1.79	0.806
8	Library employees are allowed to vary their service delivery procedures	0	0	15	32	13	28	11	23	8	17	47	100	3.26	1.093
9	Employee creativity is encouraged	19	40	11	23	6	13	10	21	1	2	47	100	2.21	1.250
10	The library provides resources for changes like additional/new requirements like tables,seats,computers, books	15	32	20	43	10	21	0	0	2	4	47	100	2.02	0.967
11	Employees suggestions are supported	14	30	16	34	13	28	1	2	3	6	47	100	2.21	1.102
12	The library facilities e.g. furniture, lighting system, windows etc. are repaired	9	19	18	38	14	30	5	11	1	2	47	100	2.38	0.990
13	Library staff are sponsored/allowed time off to take higher education or professional courses	8	17	17	36	12	26	9	19	1	2	47	100	2.23	1.108
14	We introduce new equipment in our library when the current facilities break down	8	17	17	36	12	26	9	19	1	2	47	100	2.53	1.060
15	We introduce new services in our library	14	30	15	32	15	32	3	6	0	0	47	100	2.15	0.932
16	Our information resources are the latest in the market and in the various disciplines	9	19	17	36	13	27	4	9	4	9	47	100	2.51	1.159
17	Our equipment is modern(bought in the last two years)	9	19	6	17	20	43	7	15	3	6	47	100	2.72	1.136
18	We train our customers on using the	19	41	17	36	1	2	10	21	0	0	47	100	2.04	1.141

	self-service technologies														
19	We have the most current technology	7	15	21	45	15	32	2	4	2	4	47	100	2.38	0.945
20	We have changed our service delivery procedures in the last one year	1	2	15	32	21	45	6	13	4	8	47	100	2.94	0.942
21	My library emphasises service growth through developing new ideas innovations/new information resources/advanced training	16	34	18	38	10	21	0	0	3	6	47	100	2.06	1.071
22	Library staff pay attention to procedures to get things done	17	36	22	47	3	6	2	6	3	6	47	100	1.98	1.093
23	My library emphasises outcomes and achievement very much	18	38	20	43	5	11	4	9	0	0	47	100	1.89	0.914
24	My library creates wholly new products/services for its various clients	9	19	17	36	13	28	7	15	1	2	47	100	2.45	1.039
25	My library extends services to new clients previously not served by us	7	15	18	38	10	21	10	21	2	4	47	100	2.62	1.114
26	My library incorporates new service delivery strategies into existing strategies	15	32	17	36	12	26	3	6	0	0	47	100	2.06	0.919
27	My library creates new services depending on the market	9	19	18	38	13	28	4	9	3	6	47	100	2.45	1.100
28	The library introduces new procedures to aid in the management of new services	15	32	15	32	13	28	4	8	0	0	47	100	2.13	0.969
29	The library links with other libraries in the industry	11	23	20	43	10	21	4	9	2	4	47	100	2.28	1.057
30	My library seeks to adopt service strategies/programmes /equipment used by competitors i.e. other information providers	8	17	18	38	12	26	6	13	3	6	47	100	2.53	1.120
31	Our service delivery strategies change	6	13	14	30	21	44	6	13	3	6	47	100	2.57	0.878
32	We advertise/market our products/services	4	9	16	34	18	38	7	15	2	4	47	100	2.72	0.971

33	Our user complaints have increased in the last six months	6	13	1	2	14	30	17	36	9	19	47	100	3.47	1.213
34	Our user compliments have dropped/stagnated in the last six months	5	10	15	32	12	26	15	32	0	0	47	100	2.79	1.020
<i>Cronbach Alpha Coefficient = 0.920; Composite Mean = 2.501, SD = 1.055</i>															

**Table 5. Library Service Range/Provision N=47**

With regard to library outreach services, it was established that though these existed, they were not at the desired level/standard. Hence, when asked to respond to the statement the libraries are keen to extend services to new clients previously not served by the library, only 53% of the respondents agreed that there were ongoing outreach activities; 26% of the respondents wholly disagreed. This indicates that this activity is not satisfactorily performed as summarized in Table 5. This compares to the advertising/marketing of the available library products/services, which was being done, albeit on a low scale. This position is supported by 43% of the respondents who agreed that this happened, compared to 38%, who were uncertain and 19% who disagreed that this ever happened as shown in Table 5. Similarly, library linkages with other libraries in the industry were found to be low, as only 23% of the respondents strongly agreed. This finding is closely related to the earlier finding, on the resources/services available as interlibrary service, which is a product of the library. Cooperation was rated very low as well.

It is interesting that while not much was being done in the marketing of the library resources, there was some eagerness from the librarians to create new services to meet market needs, as 57% of the respondents agreed. Further, on the creation of new products/services for their various clients, 55% of the respondents agreed that this happened. Concerning the introduction of new procedures to aid in the management of new services, the study established that this was fairly handled, as 64% of the respondents agreed that the library effected new procedures every now and then. Likewise, on the question whether or not the libraries incorporated any new library service delivery strategies into the existing strategies, it was found to be fairly accurate, with 68% of the respondents agreeing; indicating that there was some consciousness of the importance of new service strategies on the part of the libraries.

The study also underlined the fact that efforts are being made, through the acquisition of modern equipment/technology, towards the improvement of library services, albeit at a very slow pace, with only 36% of the respondents strongly agreeing. It was also noted that the academic libraries strived to provide resources for changes that occurred, such as tables, seats, computers, books (this is affirmed by the positive responses from 75% of the respondents). Regarding the maintenance of the equipment/facilities in the library, the study findings established that this indeed happened, but not as fast as was desired (only 57% of the respondents were in agreement with the statement the library facilities e.g. furniture, lighting system, windows etc. are repaired in case of breakdown). Likewise, on being asked whether new equipment is introduced in the library when the current facilities break down, 53% of the respondents agreed, making it easy to conclude that there is some degree of lethargy when it

comes to the repair and maintenance of library equipment. But, a very distinct observation is the lack of suitable furniture for the PWDs.

Finally, with regard to collection development in the libraries, it was noted that this was happening, but at a slow pace (only 55% of the respondents were in agreement that there has been acquisition of new information resources (i.e. the latest in the market) and in the various disciplines). Together with new resources was the acquisition of new skills by the librarians, which was moderately rated (only 53% of the respondents agreed to being supported to acquire new skills, training, etc. in order to improve their knowledge base and service delivery). Observations made attest to the fact that there was heavy usage of some available information resources, like books, leading to wear and tear, while others, like e-resources, were underutilised.

## **6. Conclusions**

From the study findings service gaps were identified and these will need to be addressed to give the customers seamless services, as proposed by Nash (1988). The “stages” in the service journey ought to be attractive to the customer. The results have revealed that, though libraries had made strides in providing varied information resources to their customers, these are not sufficient. There is therefore a considerable gap/shortfall in sufficiently meeting the customers’ information needs. As Kenya’s higher education sector has grown over the years, in terms of the numbers enrolled and the programmes offered, the library resources have remained disparately low. Similarly there is a serious shortage of e-library infrastructure.

The libraries too suffer from budget deficits. This, in turn, implies that they cannot adequately acquire the information resources as would be required/planned. A lack of adequate information resources and infrastructure is a major cause of customer dissatisfaction. This earns the library a bad image and poses a major challenge to customer attraction and retention. Customer attraction is function of many other attributes, such as the general cleanliness of the facility; the availability of utilities such as washrooms, baggage areas for safe custody of their personal effects; security while they use the library; and accessibility of the library itself (i.e. location) but also its information resources. Overall, the libraries, though they have a large potential market base, experience challenges with regard to customer attraction and retention.

They are not aggressive in reaching out to their customers: some have expressed dissatisfaction with the services offered. Some of the customers move to other libraries presumed to be offering better services. There is need to enhance the organizational communication to ensure information flow channels are clear of any barriers, smooth and timely to all the concerned stakeholders.

The library infrastructure is generally fair; however, it varies from one institution to the other. But as a general observation, services to special user groups, such as the PWDs, the postgraduates and faculty staff, are scanty. This marginalises these categories of users from the libraries. The unwritten script is that the libraries have concentrated largely on meeting the information needs of undergraduates only, disregarding the PWDs, postgraduates and staff. The user information needs of the PWDs clientele is in most cases being left to chance.

The results have also indicated that, though there is awareness of market orientation among the librarians, they have not fully embraced it. Further, though creativity is encouraged in the workplace, it was found to be limited, with the organisational bureaucracy playing a large role in this. This needs to be encouraged and promoted to be able to tap into the innovativeness of the employees.

The internal customers (librarians) are discontented with their employer(s) with regard to the work environment, organisational communication, remuneration, training opportunities and job security. These factors affect their work morale, and consequently their overall service delivery.

The study recommends regular staff training and development on service quality, resource and infrastructure(e.g. space, facilities and technology) improvement, user education, customer satisfaction and retention, enhancement of library budget, enforcement of (CUE) guidelines, thereby ensuring the libraries live up to their mandates and universities comply, aggressive marketing of library services and information needs analysis, leadership and leadership development and support and the national government enacts a clear policy (legal framework) on libraries and that the CUE should process a legal mandate for enforcing the policy directive(s); as this will aid the growth and enhance the status of libraries.

## **REFERENCES**

- Abdullah, F. (2006). The development of HEdPERF: a new measuring instrument of service quality for the higher education sector. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(6), pp.569-581.
- Adam, R. (2017). Assessment of Library Service Quality and User Satisfaction among Undergraduate Students of Yusuf Maitama Sule University (YMSU) Library. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. Available at <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1675/>.
- Anjum, A. and Zargar, A. S. (2018). An Empirical Study of the impact of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction and Repurchase Intentions in Hotels' of Northern India. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (IJTSRD)*, 2(3), pp.2656-2667.
- Balog, P.K, Jelusic, T.A. and Matosic, M. (2015). *Quality practices in Croatian academic libraries: two case-studies*. Paper presented at the 34<sup>th</sup> International conference on Organizational Science development” Internalization and cooperation” March 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> Portoloz Slovenia.
- Calvert, P.J. (2008). *Assessing the effectiveness and quality of libraries*. Unpublished PhD. thesis. Wellington: Victoria University.

- Chandhok, S., and Parveen, B. (2011). M-learning in distance education libraries. A case scenario of Indira Gandhi National Open University. *The Electronic Library*, 29(5), pp. 637-650.
- Chandra, T., Ng, M., and Chandra, S. (2018). The effects of service quality on student satisfaction and student loyalty: an empirical study. *Journal of social studies education research*, 9(3), pp.109-131
- Commission for University Education [CUE] (2017b) .Universities standards and guidelines. The Commission, Nairobi
- Cronin, J.J. and Taylor, S.A. (1992). Measuring Service Quality: A Re-examination and Extension. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(July), pp.55-68.
- Dabholkar, P.A. (1996). Consumer evaluations of new technology-based self-service operations: an investigation of alternative models. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 13(1), pp.29-51.
- DeShields, O., Kara, A. and Kaynak, E. (2005), "Determinants of business student satisfaction and retention in higher education: applying Herzberg's two-factor theory", *International Journal of Educational Management*, 19 (2), pp. 128-139.
- Dube, L. (2011). Quality assurance practices in university libraries in South Africa  
*South African Journal of Libraries & Information Science*, 77(1), pp.26-36.
- Government of Kenya (GoK). (2004). *Targeted Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme 2004-2008*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Government of Kenya (GoK) (2003). *Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Guru, C. (2003). Tailoring e-service quality through CMR. *Managing Service Quality*, 13(6), pp.520-531.
- Kanyangi, S. (2006). Quality Standards and Quality Assurance in Basic Education: Experiences from Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. UNESCO, Nairobi Office.
- Kargbo, J.A. (2002). African universities and the challenge of knowledge creation and application in the information age, *Library Review*, 5(8), pp. 411-116.
- Karshorda, M. and Waema, T. (2014). E-readiness survey of Kenyan Universities (2013) Report. Nairobi: Kenya Education Network [KENET]

- Leonard, F.S. and Sasser, W. E. (1982). The incline of quality. *Harvard Business Review*, 60(5). pp. 163-71.
- Leupp, H. (1924). The library the heart of the University. *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, 18, pp. 193-197. Available from [www.jstor.org/stable/25686302](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25686302)
- Marwa S.M. (2014). *Nurturing Corporate Excellence: Glimpses of Quality Challenges and Management in Contemporary Corporate Africa. A managerial Imperative*. Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- Metters, R., King-Metters, K., Pullman, M. and Walton, S. (2006). *Service operations management*. New Delhi: Cengage.
- Miller, K.F. (2008). *Service Quality in Academic Libraries: An Analysis of LibQUAL Scores and Institutional Characteristics*. Unpublished PhD. thesis, Florida: University of Central Florida.
- Misbah, M (2016). A library –“Heart of an academic institution”. Available at <https://hpssmartlibrary.wordpress.com/2016/04/13/a-library-heart-of-an-academic-institution/>
- Moropa, R. (2010). Academic libraries in transition: some leadership issues—a viewpoint. *Library Management*, 31(6), pp. 381-390.
- Mutula, S. (2000). IT developments in Eastern and Southern Africa: implications for university libraries. *Library Hi Tech*, 18(4), pp. 320-334.
- Nash, C. (1988). *A Question of Service: Action Pack, Business Management Programme, Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board*. London: National Consumer Council.
- Opaleke, J.S. (2002). Impediments to qualitative services in academic libraries in Nigeria: An examination of libraries in four institutions in Kwara State. *Library Review*, 5(2), pp. 100-106.
- Opiyo, H. (2006). Civil Service Reform Policy in Kenya: A review of the Retrenchment Strategy: *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77, pp.693-974
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49 (fall), pp.41-50.
- Paswan, A. K., and Ganesh, G. (2009). Higher education institutions: satisfaction and loyalty among international students. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19(1), pp.65-84.
- Poon, W. and Lee, C (2012). E-Service Quality: An Empirical Investigation, *Journal of Asia-*

- Rehman, S.U. (2013). Service Quality Assessment in University Libraries of Pakistan. *The Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*, 37(1), pp. 59-80.
- Rosenberg, D.B. (1997). University Libraries in Africa: A Review of their Current State and Future Potential. International African Institute, London: International African Institute. pp. 3.
- Sakthivel, P.B. and Raju, R.(2006).Conceptualizing total quality management in engineering education and developing a TQM educational excellence model. *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence* 17(7):pp.913-934
- Salman, A.A. (2015). *Issues and challenges in the provision and utilization of public library services in Nigeria*. Unpublished PhD. thesis. KwaDlangezwa: University of Zululand.
- Saitoti, G. (2003). *Education sector review: How far we have come since independence and what still needs to be done to meet the education needs of all Kenyans*. Report of the National Conference on Education and Training held at Kenyatta International Conference Centre, Nairobi, 22nd -29<sup>th</sup> Nov., pp.50-64
- Silvestro, R. and Cross, S. (2000). Applying service profit chain in a retail environment. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 11(3), pp. 244-268.
- Somaratna, S.D. and Peiris, C.N. (2011). Service quality in University of Colombo libraries: an assessment. *Annals of Library and Information Studies*, 58, pp. 1-9.
- Sultan, P. and Wong H.Y. (2011).Service quality in a higher education context: An integrated model. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 24(5), 2012pp. 755-784
- Sureshchandler, G.S., Rajendran, C. and Anatharaman, R.N. (2002). The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction: a factor specific approach. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 16(4), pp. 363-79.
- Watiki, C. (2014). *Service quality and customer satisfaction in hotels in Nairobi, Kenya*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation. Nairobi, Kenya: University of Nairobi.